

Doomed Data ... When National Governments, Coerced Narratives, and Alternative Facts Override the Quality, Importance of Statistics

Key talk at Joint Statistical Meetings features ousted Greek statistics official Andres Georgiou, addresses recent spate of manipulative, misrepresented data in political discourse

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (July 12, 2017) – With the recent spate of attacks on official statistics and threats to the broader field of science, the statistical community is convening a panel of high-profile government and industry data analysis experts to address how manipulation, misrepresentation, and abuse of data leads to an ill-informed public, a polarizing political environment, and distrust in scientific research on July 31 at 8:30 a.m. during the 2017 Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM) in Baltimore, Md.

Featured speakers include the following:

- Andreas Georgiou, former president of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT)
- Wayne Smith, former chief statistician of Canada
- Nancy Potok, chief statistician of the United States
- Ryan McNeill, Thomson Reuters

“Statistics is the foundation of scientific inquiry, and the information gleaned from data gathered by government and private sources is powerful because it is used to allocate federal funds to state and local programs, develop new medical treatments and advance scientific understanding,” said James Cochran, associate dean for research, professor of statistics and the Rogers-Spivey Faculty Fellow at the University of Alabama. He also co-founded Statistics Without Borders, a voluntary outreach group that provides “pro bono” statistics and data science services. “When data or the processes in which data are obtained and analyzed are illegitimately attacked, incorrectly referenced or blatantly skewed, it’s not just science that suffers, but also public understanding and societal good.”

Georgiou’s legal battle with the Greek government began in 2013 when he was ousted after recalculating official economic statistics (according to European Union (EU) law) that were previously misused in years-long efforts by the Greek government to understate deficit and debt figures. And, even though statistics produced under his leadership were validated and published by Eurostat (the official statistics body of the EU) for five consecutive years and numerous global statistics organizations have expressed support for his work, Georgiou’s unprecedented fight to clear his name continues.

Potok was appointed chief statistician of the United States in January. In that role, she is responsible for providing coordination, guidance and oversight for U.S. federal statistical agencies and activities at a time when top administration officials have questioned the integrity and legitimacy of government data.

Smith resigned as Canada's chief statistician last November, alleging the "independence of the national statistical office is compromised."

McNeill is a journalist on the Reuters global data team, where he has worked several data-driven investigative reports, including The Child Exchange, which was a nominated finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize in investigative reporting and tied for first place in the Investigative Reporters and Editors contest.

In addition to this session, several other presentations concerning statistics in government are scheduled to take place at JSM, including the following:

- [Public Use vs. Restricted Use: A Case Study Using the American Community Survey](#)
- [Statistics on the Hill: Data Analysis for Congressional Oversight, Program Evaluation, and Policy Analysis](#)
- [Aftermath of Katrina: Data for Core Public Health Programs and Emergency Preparedness](#)
- [Statistics Are Evidence; Evidence Is Statistics](#)

Media can attend JSM for FREE, but must pre-register by emailing Jill Talley, ASA public relations manager, at jill@amstat.org.

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About JSM 2017

JSM 2017 is the largest gathering of statisticians and data scientists in the world, taking place July 29–August 3, 2017, in Baltimore. Occurring annually since 1974, JSM is a joint effort of the American Statistical Association, International Biometric Society (ENAR and WNAR), Institute of Mathematical Statistics, Statistical Society of Canada, International Chinese Statistical Association, International Indian Statistical Association, Korean International Statistical Society, International Society for Bayesian Analysis, Royal Statistical Society and International Statistical Institute. JSM activities include oral presentations, panel sessions, poster presentations, professional development courses, an exhibit hall, a career service, society and section business meetings, committee meetings, social activities and networking opportunities.

About the American Statistical Association

The ASA is the world's largest community of statisticians and the oldest continuously operating professional science society in the United States. Its members serve in industry, government and academia in more than 90 countries, advancing research and promoting sound statistical practice to inform public policy and improve human welfare. For additional information, please visit the ASA website at www.amstat.org.

For more information:

Jill Talley

Public Relations Manager

(703) 684-1221, ext. 1865

jill@amstat.org